

Protect Oregon Cougars!

Officials propose to hammer cougars in “target zones”.

The Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife (ODFW) is proposing to use packs of radio-collared hounds and neck snares to kill all the cougars in so-called “target zones” on over 10,000 square miles of Oregon’s lands under the pretext of protecting mule deer and reducing conflicts with humans and livestock.

ODFW’s “target zones” harm cougars, won’t grow deer herds, won’t prevent conflicts, and must be stopped. The state must develop a new cougar management plan, based upon the best available science.

Rare on the landscape, cougars suffer from both fluctuations in their wild prey populations and from human-caused mortalities.ⁱ In order to persist for future generations, cougars need habitat, wild prey and freedom from high-levels of human-caused threats.ⁱⁱ



Comprehensive scientific studies demonstrate that killing cougars will not help mule deer recovery.

Killing native carnivores to increase deer populations is unlikely to grow mule deer herds. If cougars (and coyotes) had been absent from ecosystems, studies show mule deer are susceptible to dying from other causes of mortality, including poor access to nutritional reserves.ⁱⁱⁱ

1. Protecting breeding does and mule deer herds’ access to adequate nutrition is the key factor in maintaining healthy populations. Each year, some deer will die no matter what. Food resources limit deer populations. Mule deer survival is absolutely reliant on deer herds’ ability to gain access to adequate nutrition – but that nutrition can be hindered by weather, habitat loss, oil and gas development, fire suppression, and competition with domestic livestock.^{iv}
2. Biologists found that managing winter range for mule deer, weed control and reseeding, greatly benefitted them.^v

Heavy persecution creates social chaos in cougar communities, increasing both mortalities and human conflicts.

When trophy hunters remove the stable adult cougars from a population, the rest experience social chaos from the disruption. The loss of stable adults encourages subadult males to immigrate, leading to greater aggression between cats and even more deaths to adult females and their kittens.^{vi} This influx of immigrating subadult males, less skilled at hunting, are also more likely to be involved in human and livestock conflicts, studies show.^{vii} Also, if a trophy hunter kills a female cougar, her young kittens will die from starvation or dehydration.^{viii}

Hounding and neck snaring cougars is unsporting, unfair, unpopular and harmful.

Voters have twice opposed the use of hounds to hunt cougars. In 1994, voters passed Measure 18 by a substantial majority, and an even greater majority in 1996 voted to reject a measure to repeal Measure 18. Yet Oregon wildlife managers use houndsmen as volunteer “agents” to hunt down and kill large numbers of cougars in these “target zones” in a blatant end-run around Oregon voters. Twice as many cougars are hunted down now, compared to 1994.

Radio-collared trailing hounds to chase cougars (“hounding”) and bay them into trees or rock ledges so the trophy hunter can shoot the cat at close range. Hounds kill kittens, and cougars often injure or kill hounds.^{ix} Hounding is not considered “fair chase” hunting by most.^x Additionally, hounds chase non-target wildlife and trespass onto private lands.^{xi} The state also relies on the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Wildlife Services program to snare cougars by the neck. Neck snares are egregiously cruel because they do not kill quickly, cause the animals to suffer for several hours and can capture non-target species.^{xii}

It’s time for lawmakers and our Governor to stand up for cougars! Please urge ODFW to devise a new cougar management plan that uses the best available science and adopts Oregonian values.

Sources:

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- ⁱⁱ R. F. Noss et al., "Conservation Biology and Carnivore Conservation in the Rocky Mountains," *Conservation Biology* 10, no. 4 (1996); J. L. Weaver, P. C. Paquet, and L. F. Ruggiero, "Resilience and Conservation of Large Carnivores in the Rocky Mountains," *Conservation Biology* 10, no. 4 (1996).
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- ^v E. J. Bergman et al., "Habitat Management Influences Overwinter Survival of Mule Deer Fawns in Colorado," *Journal of Wildlife Management* 78, no. 3 (2014).
- ^{vi} C. M. S. Lambert et al., "Cougar Population Dynamics and Viability in the Pacific Northwest," *Journal of Wildlife Management* 70, (2006); H. S. Cooley et al., "Does Hunting Regulate Cougar Populations? A Test of the Compensatory Mortality Hypothesis," *Ecology* 90, no. 10 (2009); H. S. Robinson and R. Desimone, "The Garnet Range Mountain Lion Study: Characteristics of a Hunted Population in West-Central Montana: Final Report," *Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks*, (2011); R. B. Wielgus et al., "Effects of Male Trophy Hunting on Female Carnivore Population Growth and Persistence," *Biological Conservation* 167, (2013); H. S. Robinson et al., "A Test of the Compensatory Mortality Hypothesis in Mountain Lions: A Management Experiment in West-Central Montana," *Journal of Wildlife Management* 78, no. 5 (2014); D. C. Stoner et al., "Dispersal Behaviour of a Polygynous Carnivore: Do Cougars *Puma Concolor* Follow Source-Sink Predictions?," *Wildlife Biology* 19, no. 3 (2013).
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- ^{viii} Stoner et al., "Cougar Exploitation Levels in Utah: Implications for Demographic Structure, Population Recovery, and Metapopulation Dynamics."
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- ^x J. Posewitz, *Beyond Fair Chase: The Ethic and Tradition of Hunting* (Helena, Montana: Falcon Press, 1994); T. L. Teel, R. S. Krannich, and R. H. Schmidt, "Utah Stakeholders' Attitudes toward Selected Cougar and Black Bear Management Practices," *Wildlife Society Bulletin* 30, no. 1 (2002).
- ^{xi} See e.g., Hank Hristienko and Jr. McDonald, John E., "Going in the 21st Century: A Perspective on Trends and Controversies in the Management of the Black Bear " *Ursus* 18, no. 1 (2007).
- ^{xii} See e.g., G. Proulx et al., "Humaneness and Selectivity of Killing Neck Snares Used to Capture Canids in Canada: A Review," *Canadian Wildlife Biology and Management* 4, no. 1 (2015).

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